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Three stories toward creation

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Three Stories Toward Creation

By Rodrigo Gómez Claros

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

MFA Imaging Arts/ Computer Animation
SCHOOL OF FILM AND ANIMATION
ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
ROCHESTER, NEW YORK
May, 2002

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Permission

Three Stories Toward Creation

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April 25, 2002

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I. Acknowledgements



Three Stories Toward Creation is a 3D / 2D animated work submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Imaging Arts/Computer Animation School of Film and Animation - Rochester Institute of Technology. Rochester, New York.

The thesis committee for this production was formed by: Skip Battaglia (Chair), Stephanie Maxwell, and Johnny Robinson.

This production was finished and screened in February 25th, 2002 at the Rochester Institute of Technology.

II. Objectives of this Paper



- a. To understand the creative process of **Three Stories Toward Creation**.
- b. To identify the historic, graphic and personal elements that took place in the animated work.
- c. To clarify the concept of the animated work.
- d. To establish a relationship between concept and technique.
- e. To identify what the author learned from the animated production.
- f. To project future of **Three Stories Toward Creation**.

III. Objectives of the Animated Work



- a. To present three stages of Latin American civilization through the use of archeological symbols, historic elements, story telling and animation, as a building up process of a new culture and as a political document in the dialogue about cultural discrimination.
- b. To understand the concept of culture as the result of cyclic thesis, antithesis and synthesis processes.
- c. To create a personal interpretation of both the historic and the mythological world in Latin America.
- d. To bring to young Latin American audiences not only a visually beautiful work, but also an educational message that teaches the value of Latin American culture and heritage.
- e. To begin an animated TV series using these episodes as a pilot.
- f. To take the author to a different level of understanding in relationship to his religious heritage and the Indian influence in his life.

- g. To pursue and develop new animated techniques that express a unique personal style of storytelling in animation.
- h. To create a work that is enjoyable to produce.

IV. Motivation



Three Stories Toward Creation is the result of a long time learning process as a graphic designer in Colombia, and being interested and involved with symbols, icons and representations of pre-Columbian native civilizations. The idea of a pre-Columbian theme for an animated work was a concept originally planned for my second year graduate (winter) film in the school of Film and Animation. But it really took shape after reading the books *Aztec* and *Aztec Autumn* by Gary Jennings just before the proposal of my thesis film. In his narration Jennings presents the story of a native Mexica who lives through the time of drastic change and the clash of cultures when the Spaniards invaded the American continent in the XV century. I was also motivated by the injustice that Indian communities endure today and how we forget that many of our traditions and cultural expressions are highly influenced by them.

When thinking in a work that I would enjoy and something that I could do with the knowledge I have gathered from my past experience and research, it became apparent that it had to be something directly related to my culture and my roots. It is what I know the most, and it is what sparks passion in my thoughts. As a student of graphic design in Colombia, I had the chance to work with many different facets of native cultures, and unique images full of

meaning and wonderful simplicity. Anthropomorphic shapes, gods, stamps, clay figurines, gold ornaments, and monumental sculptures were the focus of my study and analysis. They have helped to create the concepts of basic design that I apply in most of my graphics solutions today. In **Three Stories Toward Creation** I could bring back all those elements but this time using motion, time and sound as a source of communication. Colombian groups like Chibcha, Tairona, Quimbaya, Tumaco, and Calima offered a rich variety of sources to enhance my theme. It was also very important to show how bigger civilizations like the Aztecs, the Mayas and Incas shared similar experiences and expressed similar mythologies. I felt that my work would not only be appealing for Colombians but for all Hispanic audiences.

There are some other reasons that triggered my interest in making this work. Traditions that we take for granted, like the importance of corn in our daily meals, the pottery making tradition, the impressive gold work of our artisans, the pride we have for our land, our artistic expressions, and the Amazon as a source of life are traditions that are more than historic memoirs. They are there to help us remember who we are and what we want to be.

A negative aspect that moved me to produce this piece is the fact that we Colombians and Latin Americans still want to be like Europeans. We still experience a psychological inferiority. We want to be blond-haired, blue-eyed and tall people. We take visual clichés, presented sometimes as fashion, into our culture, denying the richness of what we are and trying to mimic the rest of the world instead of pursuing to be a part of it. Moved by this idea, I wanted to create a piece to show a civilization that has much to offer to the world. I wanted to make it clear that we have a past that makes us valuable to the world.

After reading the book *Aztec*, I found myself taking a position against Catholicism. Not because I had lost my faith, but because of all the wrong things Spaniards did in the name of Catholicism.



*Muisca Raft
representing the
myth of El Dorado
Colombia*

It was very interesting to confront the majestic forces of Indian religion against the power of Christian traditions, and to understand that well known things like the concept of the Trinity can be so complex and difficult to understand for an Indian, as any pre-Columbian idol could be for us.

In addition, the myth of El Dorado had to be part of my original idea. There have been hundreds of enterprises in the Amazon jungle looking for the famous lost city of El Dorado. There is even a new expedition right now, using XXI Century technology in order to satisfy the same greed and ambition that filled the Conquistador's heart. That search for wealth, that throws away the real values of humankind, is very well explained by Eduardo Galeano in his book *The Open Veins of Latin America*. He describes how European expeditions tore down entire cities, pyramids, and palaces. How they destroyed any economic and social structure. And, how the European powers took material benefit from it. Galeano also questions how natives were made life long slaves who died during their cruel enslavement, and how after centuries the same story is being repeated by other conquerors shaping Latin America into what it is today, a "Third World" continent.

Many were the reasons, mixed feelings of rage and pride, combined with emotions in shape and color, in movement and time, all were the motivation to produce work. The primary reason was to leave a document for younger generations to remember where we came from and to aim to where we are going.

V. Process of Creation

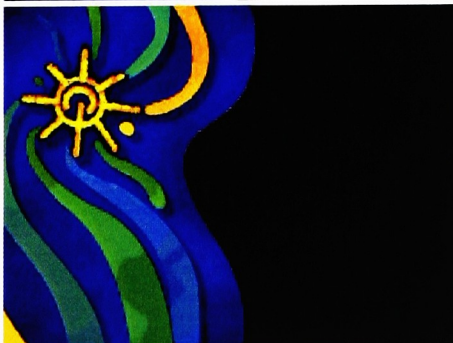
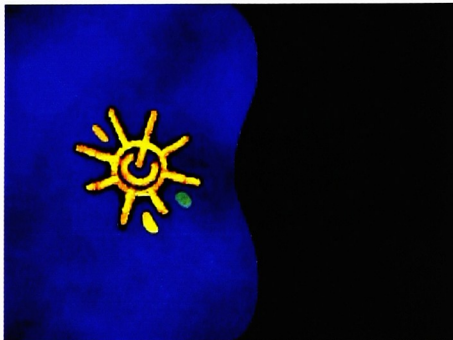
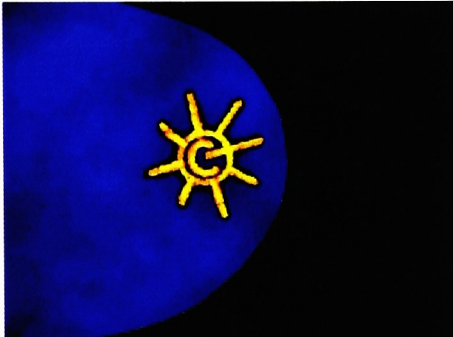


When working on the storyboards for **Three Stories Toward Creation** I wanted each of three parts to stand by itself, but at the same time to be part of a whole. This work was created to keep growing to create an ongoing and wider presentation of my cultural heritage and the reasons for what we are today. The three episodes in this production have many different sources of inspiration.



A. The first episode, the story of **Bachué**, is based on the Muisca or Chibchas civilization. This group was located in the eastern cordillera of Colombia along the region of what is called today the Bogotá Plateau, which is 2,600 meters above sea level. This is the story of a goddess who came from a sacred lake carrying her son, and after he had grown up he married his mother, and they populated the earth and taught their children the arts of socialization and the value of corn as the fruit of the earth. This story of Bachué is very similar to some of the myths of creation from the Incas in Perú, Bolivia and the north of Chile. All of them convey the myth of a woman as a mother of creation, that life comes from

water, and the importance of earth and the arts of social life. Corn is also a key element for Indians of the American continent. All of the groups link corn to the gods, especially Sun, Moon, and Earth. Maize was so important because of its nutritional values. According to G. Reichel-Dolmatoff in his book *Colombia - Ancient Peoples and Places* "They did not invent horticulture; they helped it develop by building upon the experience of generations. Fishermen moved from the coasts to the inlands along the rivers changing from aquatic sources of food to the earth and maize as the main product combined with beans, and some roots like manioc (yucca)"



Sun and Moon are the supreme gods. They play their roles in my work as the relation between light and darkness, as forces of the universe, and as light related to good and dark to evil. It was also the concept of two worlds of life and death, the well-known world and the mystery of the afterlife.

The presence of snakes in the story of Bachué is related to the fact that life comes from water and that all the creatures coming from aquatic world are symbols of fertility and long life. Bachué becomes a snake and goes back to the lake where she came from.

My personal interpretation of this myth is conveyed in this story by combining the world of light and the world of darkness. I decided to divide the screen into two halves, one was full of color and shapes as a living world, and the other was a black hole without a defined boundary and insinuating the message of the unknown and mysterious world of the afterlife. The screen division was initially conceived as

a straight line breaking two parts, but it evolved into a more playful representation of the movements of life as an ever changing boundary according with the action of the story and the interaction between the two worlds.



*Pedestal Bowl detail
Middle Sinú region
Colombia*



*Pedestal Bowl detail
Middle Sinú region
Colombia*

The production opens with the presence of flying birds that bring light to the creation as messengers of the gods Sun and Moon, the birds open the portals for them to come into the world. The representation of the birds was adapted from an anthropo- zoomorphic pectoral; the figure represents a composite creature with human and animal characteristics. The antropomorphic character emphasizes the shaman's role as mediator of the positive and negative, male and female forces that underlie all phenomena (Tolima style, Magdalena River, Colombia).

The icons of Sun and Moon were taken from an ancient pedestal bowl found in middle Sinú region in Colombia. The bowl depicts an armadillo and is perceived as a uterine symbol of fertility. There are hundreds of different graphic representations of the gods Sun and Moon in native cultures, but I took this one because it has a beautiful simplicity that communicates the relationship between the Sun and the Moon and the perfection of the form when they are in sexual intercourse.

When Sun and Moon come to the world, water is the result of that union, signifying the fluids of love that become lakes and seas where all the creatures of the fertile world live. The way I recreate water, with snake-like shapes that move in sync with the sounds of streams, is an intentional experiment with forms that flow and curl in a variety of colors symbolizing the beauty and movement of the genesis of life.

Bachué and her son come from the lake. They run through the creation that gods have made, going up the mountains to ar-

rive at the summit of their lives to follow the commandments of the gods. Civilization comes from the union of male and female symbols as a river of life that never stops. Civilization means a high level of cultural and technological development, and that was Bachué's mission, to teach and to bring change and maturation to a society. I showed the beginning of that civilization by creating a flower composition of human petals that becomes the fruit of corn. The crop of the corn is to praise the gods, and the reunion of the tribe around it represent the idea of community and religion showing that Bachué's task of creation and teaching was accomplished. Finally, Bachué and her son go back to the lake as snakes to leave the myth open for generations to expect their return.

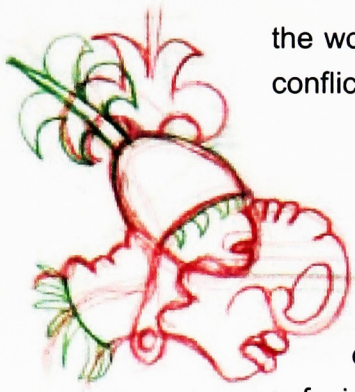
B. The second episode **Broken Pot** is visually, conceptually and technically a more complex piece. The story is a composition of specific elements involving Colombian native traditions and more generic events that happened to almost all the Indian groups from the Aztecs in Mexico to the Incas in northern Chile. It starts with the presence of the pot as a wonderful ever changing shape and the container of a life that moves and stretches before it is born. The pottery-making tradition in pre-Columbian

groups was very important, not only as a source of the utensils for the daily chores, but as medium of representation of the society and their activities. Generic figures of shamans, priests, and rulers are portrayed to emphasize the importance of social and communal ideas over the significance of the individual ego. It was also a mystical activity; when a pot was being made it could tell the future things to come and what events gods were about to send to their people.

The idea of foreseeing is shown in the film when the pot breaks and the priest runs away to tell his ruler about it. The pot breaks to be part of

*Shaman figurine.
Malagana style
Popayán region
Colombia*





the world of mystery and unexplained events that create the conflict in this episode.

The priest or shaman is represented in the film with a fantastic adaptation as a human-animal character. Some clay figures from the Malagana style in Colombia show the shaman figure with an animal companion on his back. The design of this character tries to link his facial and body expression to those clay figurines, exaggerating details like his nose, his coffee bean eyes, and the bird-like hands. However, I did not want to create a additional animal character as a companion. I adapted his movements and posture to a frog/jaguar like pose that runs on his four legs through the fields of corn.

The changing of pace, from the fluid movement of the pot to a fast and distorted composition of corn plants that the shaman has go through, is an intentional stressing action that shows the difficult moments that native groups lived previous to the coming of the invaders. Their world was so full of beliefs and

fears that it was very easy to expect a misinterpretation of the signals.

The shaman

tells his ruler what he saw. The

ruler in this work is called

Zipa; chief and supreme

leader of the Muisca,

But, it could have

been any other ruler,

like Moctezuma for

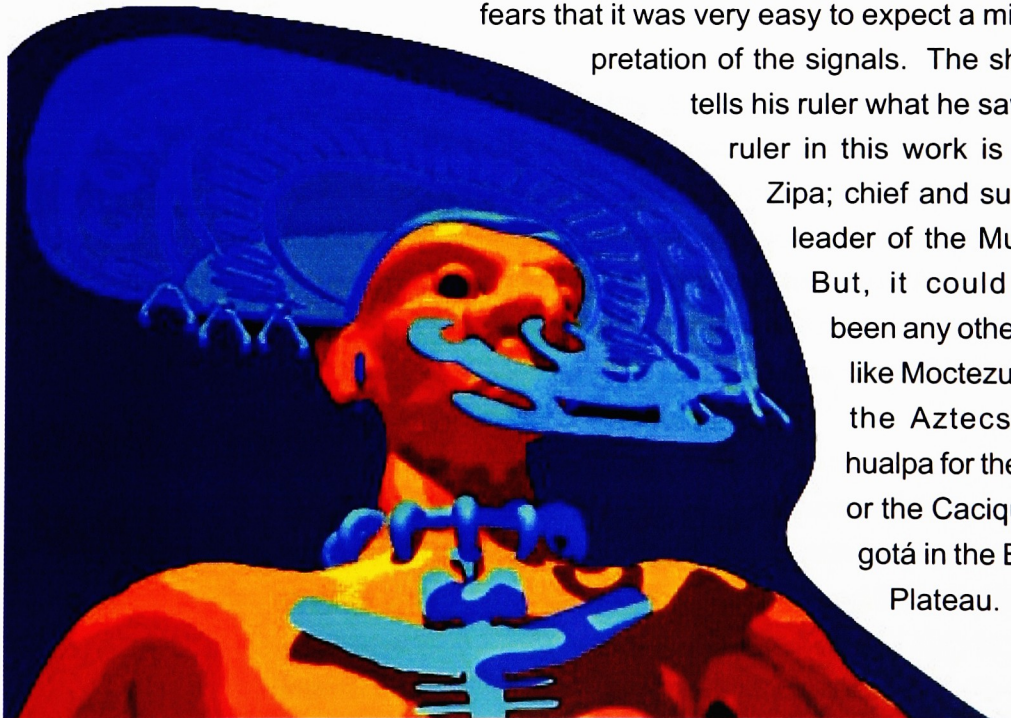
the Aztecs, Ata-

hualpa for the Incas

or the Cacique Bo-

gotá in the Bogota

Plateau.



Zipa is a defiant character who stands up to show his supremacy and status. A strong body covered with beautiful ornaments and a facial design portrays his role in the work. The ornaments are based on designs from Colombian native groups. The headdress is an adaptation from a Muisca gold figurine and the nose ornament are figures based on the main character in the Muisca Raft, a famous golden piece that represents the legend of El Dorado. The pectoral is an adaptation from an anthropo-zoomorphic figure of the Tolima style. The bracelet design is adapted from the Tierradentro gold work found in burial places. It is characterized by the jaguar representation with big eyeteeth as in the San Agustin sculptures. Colombian native groups are well known in the archeological world for their excellent gold work. Groups like Tumaco, Calima, Malagana, San Agustin, Cauca, Nariño, Tolima, Quimbaya, Sinú, Urabá Tairona y Muiscas based their work on the religious statement that gold was the Sun god who had become matter as a symbol of energy and creation. Zipa is part of that symbol on earth that has to prepare his people for the coming of the gods.

After Zipa is informed of the danger, there is a segment in the work where elements morph from the broken pot to snakes, then to abstract designs, like the sun, and finally to the cross. In this section I wanted to represent some of the thoughts that could have been in Zipa's head at that moment. With a mixture of fear, beliefs, and guesses before new signals that were absolutely mysterious to him, Zipa decides to praise the gods whomever they are.

The Conquistador is presented as a horseman being, referring to the misinterpretation of the new god with four legs and covered in shiny metal shields. He looks around first, and then he pays attention to Zipa's offerings as evidence of his inquisitor intentions. When Zipa offers his land and culture to the in-



*Design of flat stamp
Quimbaya style*

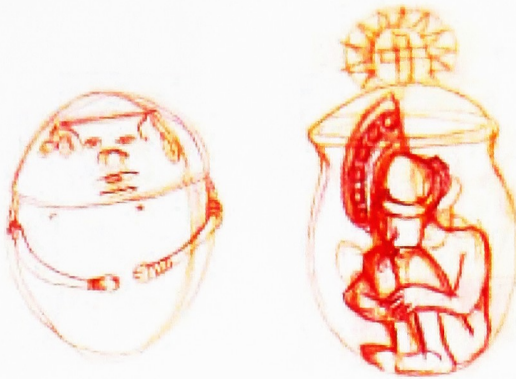


vader, the world that was divided in two halves becomes one. Symbols of the pre-Columbian heritage fill the screen for the first time in a celebration of anthropomorphic figures combined with zoomorphic representations of jaguar, monkey, bird and snake. The prophecy of the new world is fulfilled only to discover that it was a planned betrayal that brings the fantasy into a feared cruel reality. The Indian's hand is cut into two parts by the new metal weapon symbolizing the breaking of a creative authentic era. The tearing of the screen can be compared with the breaking pot that shows what is inside. It is the new beginning, a new light. The newborn will have to suffer the dramatic conditions of his new environment. The image left is the falling golden bracelet that becomes the three dimensional object detached of any cultural value, but with a price that costs the lives of thousands.

The Conquistador gallops away followed by the memory of what he has destroyed. My interpretation of this segment is that the Conquistador destroyed a civilization but he never got away with it. A civilization disappears but the evidence of its existence will prevail forever.

C. The third episode, **Cross of Gold**, makes a statement that is not as historically true as the other two parts of this production. I intended to create a closure to the preceding parts by taking reference from those Conquistadors who died in the land that one day was their new colony. It is clear that this short story says a lot about my thoughts and beliefs in front of our Latin American life, a life of centuries of destruction and adaptation to new ways of thinking.

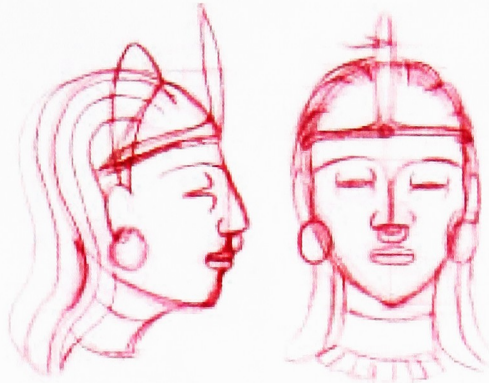
The old Conquistador carrying the heavy cross of his actions sees how those memories from the past are more a part of his



everyday life. The dreams of richness and wealth are long gone. A few of the Conquistadors were rewarded with that wealth and good fortune, but most of them were not. The thieves, the fortune seekers, the uneducated class out of the Spanish oligarchy had to open their future in this new world by fighting against each other and against their past. The cross that was the excuse for destruction becomes a burden of penance, and the gold that never came keeps reminding the old man of his disgrace. This society refused to consider themselves as equals to the few native habitants left, but they kept mating with them to procreate the coming owners of the new world. In this segment, Indian representations take away the Conquistador to bring him through the world of mystery and the darkness of the unknown beginning of the new culture. He is dropped

in an Indian burial urn and tapped with a Christian sign where the combination of the cultures starts to appear. The coming generations, a result of Indian and Spanish blood, were represented in the film by the final image of the two merging characters.

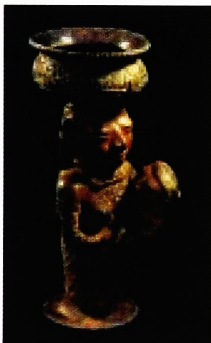
D. In the creation of this film I dealt with some other aspects besides the political and historical themes. The work had to be beautiful, innovative and rich in meaning. These three concepts are closely related to the conscious treatment of form, color and movement.



Form

Three Stories Toward Creation had in the process of pre-production and production a well-studied concept of forms based on the research of figures and symbols from pre-Columbian and the Hispanic archeology and history. Some of the symbols and representations in the work are adaptations of static pieces of gold and pottery objects modified

to fit into the animated world. The design of the characters creates an intentional relationship between the character and his/her role in the animated production.



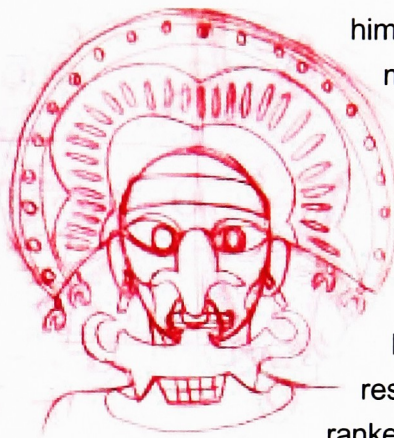
*Mother and Child
Middle Sinú River
region - Colombia*

The design of Bachué is taken from clay figurines found in artworks from the middle Sinu River region. Some of the woman figures come holding a child to remark on the woman's motherhood nature. Bachué carries her son, taking the same posture as those clay figurines, but her scale is different. She is taller and thinner to give her character a dynamic and more appealing look for the audience. She has other characteristics similar to those figurines, like the coffee bean eyes shape, the straight position of her lips, the simple solution of her nose, and the body ornaments like pendants and bracelets.

Bachué's son was designed with the idea of a little boy who probably becomes a warrior or a king. His body is strong and muscled. His head design takes elements of simplicity from some Malagana Masks. His profile is a stylized solution that tries to communicate a sense of harmony. Coffee bean eyes and small straight lips are also present in his design.



The shaman's form and design, as mentioned above, takes elements from representations of priests with animal companion figures. Some of the sculptures in San Agustín are squatted to bear the jaguar or spiritual companion on their back as the shaman in this piece is. He does not carry the jaguar on



him but inside, the way he runs and moves express that interpretation. His face is the exaggeration of what could be a pottery work with a perforated nose and long deformed ears, coffee bean eyes, and straight-line lips. His headdress is representative of some of the high-ranked people in the pre-Columbian society. This design was adapted from the Late Quimbaya style.



*Gold design
Muisca region
Colombia*

Zipa's design is intended to give him a majestic presence. A strong muscled body with perfect proportions try to give the idea of his supreme authority. His head though is modified with sharp-angled features and different sources of design. The ball-shaped eyes and the well-defined eyebrows, adapted from some of the San Agustin sculptures, differentiate him from the other characters in this work. His eagle-like nose stands out from his face to work as a hook to hold the jaguar teeth pendant. The simplified nose pendant, taken from the Muisca gold work, is configured with upper and lower rows of teeth connected by two elements that are considered his eyeteeth. This element is called by anthropologists "Mueca-olmeca". There is also an extra pair of eyeteeth on the upper row to convey the jaguar's ferocity. Zipa holds a staff characteristic of rulers and high status personalities. The design of this element is based on details of some gold figurines from the Muisca region. Details, like the top semi-circular head with smaller sticks and hanging thin elements could be meant to represent the relationship between the chief and Sun God.



The Conquistador design is an adaptation from the story of when the native people saw the invaders for the first time on their horses, they thought both the



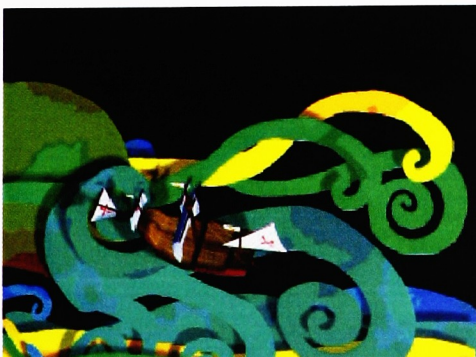
horse and the man were one whole being. The traditional helmet and bearded face are indispensable to identify the Conquistador. His face is the only part that is meant to be realistic to enforce the Indian misinterpretation. The horse design does not look for the realistic solution of the man's head. In an opposite solution,

it is a simplified, smooth metal character with no details, but the rivets that complement the metaphoric and advanced concept of the powerful God.

The Old Conquistador is designed to establish a closer view of today's world. He kept some of the Conquistador's head features, but his body was modified to be a diminished representation of what he has become. He shows his upper body skin in a transformation from the strong metallic being into a beaten human no longer a God.

In the animation of forms and shapes there is an intentional idea of continuous morphing design. I tried to create a smooth sequence of events that would go along with the story through the symbolic presence of time and life. Figures that represent water

in a different way are adapted from Aztec artwork. Streams of fluid lines become curling shapes in a sequence of snake-like forms that repeat until the following event comes into the screen to create a new sequence.



The compositional layout of the screen could be considered a very important design element. The first two episodes of the film take

place from the left bottom corner of the screen as a solution that plays with the concept of the earth native life against the black mythic world, which is at the top right “void” section of the frame. There is no boundary to that mythic world because it does not have a frame to limit its shape. The native world moves in its corner letting some elements to go to the other side momentarily and changing its shape as a volatile space that communicates the idea of evolution and the interaction between known and unknown worlds.

Each component of the design has its meaning in **Three Stories Toward Creation**. Pieces are put together to form a whole, to communicate the final concept of change and creation.

Color

After the solution of form, color became the part of the process that I most enjoy working with. My experience as a graphic designer has always been characterized by the use of color as very important tool for communication and visual impact. What is beautiful and well-design strikes the eye and mind of its audience without any explanation. I try to keep that concept in mind always, and **Three Stories Toward Creation** is not an exception to that rule. As the concept of life and death, good and evil were the main idea for each composition, color as a symbol of light was exposed against black. The result was a great contrast of messages that speak for themselves.

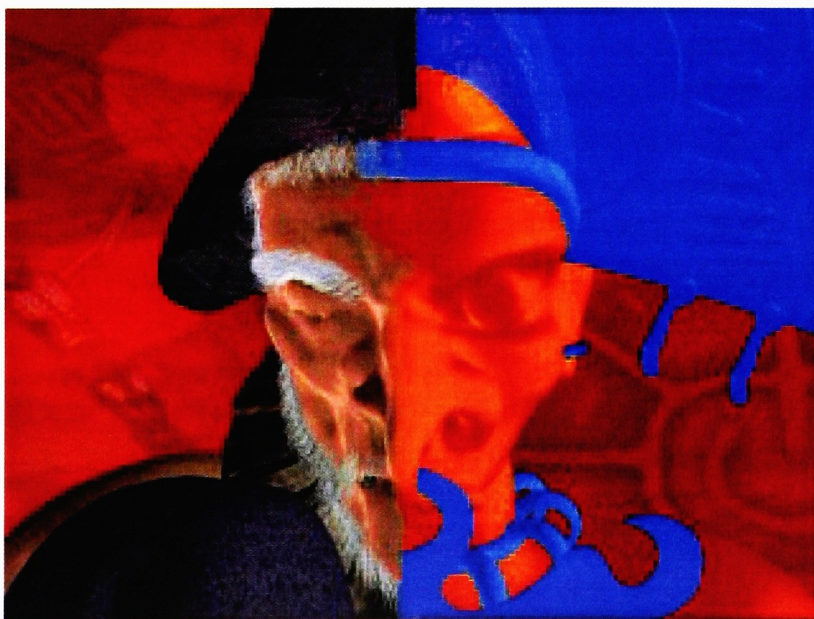


Primary and secondary colors are combined to produce the effects I wanted. Water compositions were made of not more than seven basic colors that followed a pace and visual rhythm of greens, blues and turquoises, then it was broken by a highly contrasted component as visual impact, in this case yellow. In addition, yellow as the symbol of the sun and of gold fitted perfectly with the idea of creation and light.

The permanent intense blue in the backdrop helps to create an atmosphere that changes depending on the other colors on the screen. It never changes in hue or tone, but it can be interpreted as day, if it is compared with the absolute blackness of the background, or night if it is seen against the brighter elements that lay over it. The important mission of that blue backdrop is to produce the sense of space that contains the world that we know.

The color of the characters were decided upon to achieve a non-realistic approach in **Bachué** and **Broken Pot**. As many of the forms and designs in the work are based on clay pottery figures, I decided to strengthen that solution with the orange skin. It is also an excuse to idealize the close relationship that pre-Columbian groups had with nature and earth. The gold ornaments are treated as blue surfaces that express a completely different interpretation that natives had of this material. The change from blue to golden color is the evidence of the value it took when the Europeans stepped on the American continent.

The third segment, **Cross of Gold**, is radically different in style and aesthetics compared to the other two episodes. Color



becomes more realistic in the beginning of it, but it changes when the memories from the past come into action. The treatment of light and color took on an in-between quality of realistic color and mythic approach, and at the end this is what the work is about, the mixing of ideas and ways of thinking.

Movement

There is an intentional treatment of animation in this work, and it can be divided in three parts.

Characters move through the screen trying to follow the continuing flow of ideas, in a smooth and fluent way. Each character creates its own behavior that goes along with a meaning and status of personification. They base their performance mainly on body expression, and their actions are closely related to other characters and to the stage around them. Characters are the 3D part of this work, and that technical characteristic made them move a little differently compared to the rest of elements on the screen. They could move in any direction (X,Y,Z), opposed to the 2D figures that only move in two (X,Y).

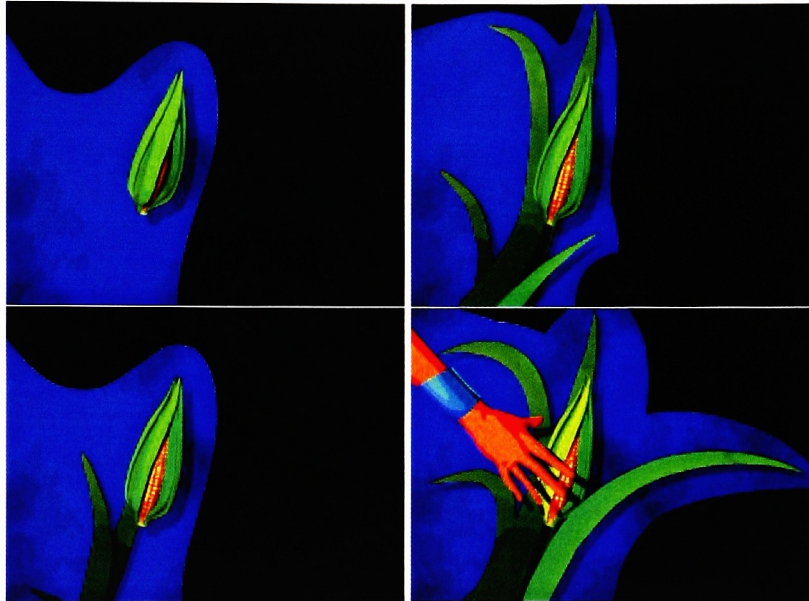
The 2D shapes animation was designed to lead the audience through the story of **Bachué** and **Broken Pot**. They create paths of movement that change continuously, going from one idea to the next. They move through the screen with repeated

forms that curl and revolve, becoming the changing frame and the fantastic world of myths that is broken when the Conquistador comes.



The third element of movement are the transitions between shots and scenes. I decided to reinforce the idea of storytelling by creating transitions instead of straight cuts. Those transitions composed by the use of 2D

shapes that connect one shot with the next one, helped the characters to appear and disappear on the screen in a very subtle way without losing continuity.



VI. Technical Development



The process of creation in any art expression involves an important participation of the technique that seeks some degree of originality and innovation. It is easy also to be overly influenced by the technique and forget about the concept, as a document that says something. The technique in this work relates to the story itself, but also says something about me and my evolution as a graphic artist. But this is not the most important part of **Three Stories Toward Creation**. This work could have been made with absolutely different tools and still it would communicate what it has to communicate. In this thesis I could expend hundreds of pages describing how every pixel was made, but I will not do that. I will refer to things I believe are personally relevant and important to those who eventually read this document.

The merging of two cultures is the reason that made this work to be a combination of two and three-dimensional elements. The need for always metamorphoses throughout the work to determine which software I would use.

Chronologically, the production of **Three Stories Toward Creation** began with the 3D modeling process of the seven charac-



*Freeform
Phantom Desktop*

ters that participate in the film. I had the fortune and good opportunity to work with a new technique that is still in the process of development and commercialization among the big studios and 3D houses. Freeform is a program that allows the user to create his/her digital three-dimensional models with a real sculpting experience. It works with a device called Phantom Desktop, which is a mechanical tool that lets the user manipulate 3D data as if it were a physical piece. The important part of it is that for those who enjoy the traditional process of sculpting, it is very easy to create any object or character three or four times faster than with any other 3D modeling tool. However, it has its disadvantages, because it works with very high-density models, not appropriate for animation purposes. For that reason I had to pass the final model of each character through different programs to decimate their high amount of data. Programs like Goemagic and Spider gave me lower resolution models easier to manipulate in animation.

Another process that took me some time to resolve was the two-dimensional animated figures. After trying with Macromedia Flash, Abohe Live-Motion and Adobe After Effects, the latter one was the most appropriate to accomplish my objectives. It needed to be a 2D-vector tool with animation capabilities easy to overlay and compose with 3D sequences coming from external sources. After Effects has a feature called Masks, a vector line tool that let me animate 2D simple shapes with not much difficulty, and possible to be combined with footage from other programs. A shape was drawn in Adobe PhotoShop and a vector path was created out of it. Then this vector path was transferred over to After Effects to be moved and key framed in sync with the 3D sequences coming from Maya.

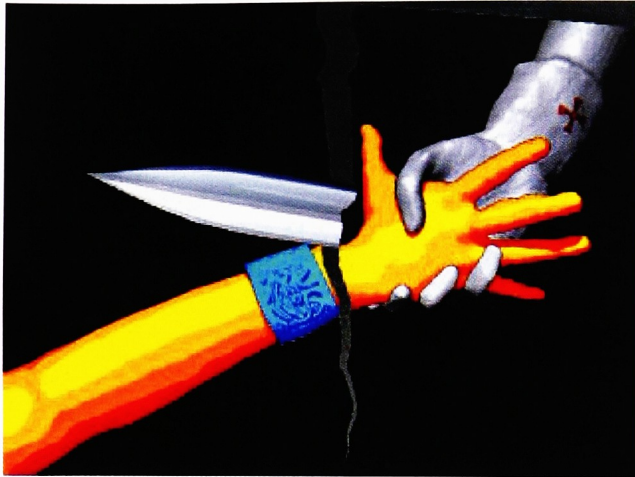
The composition of 2D elements and 3D sequences was made in two different ways. The first one was to create a simple animated sequence in Maya using a temporary camera setup as a reference to be transferred into After Effects. The 2D animation was

made on top of the temporary 3D data. Then the 2D morphing shapes were brought into Maya as a plane where the 3D characters and camera setup were adjusted to produce the final animation to be composed back into After Effects.

The second technique was to create a 2D sequence that was going to work as a moving stage where the 3D characters were animated in Maya. At the end the two elements were combined in After Effects to produce the final animation.

The animation of masks in After Effects produced some difficulties, like the non-fluent circular transformations that forced me to create tracking lines to follow, sometimes frame by frame, to ensure that the shape was going to move smoothly. An example of this is the scene when Bachué comes out of the lake. She spins around while a whirlpool of 2D shapes surrounds her. It was very important to have the curly shapes placed around, appearing in front and behind of her. Another moment that required the presence of tracking lines was the scene when Bachué and her son become snakes to go back to the lake. The movement of the snakes had to be smooth after replacing the 3D characters moving in a semicircular “S” shape that was not easy to do. In this scene, it is also important to mention how the sequence of the 3D characters becoming 2D shapes was made in a seamless transformation of masks. The process was not difficult; the 3D characters were animated in Maya jumping into the void to make them rotate around for some seconds. Then the 2D animated masks in After Effects took the direction and position of the characters to follow their movements while they were rotating. Finally, the 2D masks created for the snakes was duplicated and applied on the three-dimensional layer of the characters, and by the additive transition from one to the other they produced the desired effect.

There were very complex compositions that required the participation of more than 20 different layers working at the same time



in After Effects. Scenes like the two hands and the knife that cuts the native's wrist to let the bracelet fall involved elements like the breaking of the black background and the division of the screen to show the new world that was behind. It was necessary to split all the elements in two, to separate them while the foreground action was happening at the same time.

As the two hands had different treatments in terms of texturing and filtering, they had to be rendered separately using an alpha channel for each one of them. Then they were composed and split again to let the knife cut through them. The knife was also divided in order to let it appear in each half. And finally, the bracelet that falls off had to use various layers to accomplish its final effect . It required a very delicate process of adjustments and synchronicity.

Other minor details like the dust when the horse trots away and the old conquistador stepping on the sandy land were produced with the 2D layering technique in After Effects, instead of 3D complex particles sequences.

VII. Challenges and Obstacles



The main challenge in any animated piece is to finish it, because of the slow processes that it involves. I did not have trouble in finishing this production. I created a day to day schedule to follow, and it gave me the results I needed. However, there were some other important goals not easy to accomplish.

The idea of taking elements from the pre-Columbian culture and the Hispanic heritage to create a personal interpretation as a historic, artistic and political expression was a big challenge to me. It was not only about interpreting the past, but creating a new document to take the audience into world of myth and history, to say that our present and our future are the result of them, and that we are part of that history which is changing every day.

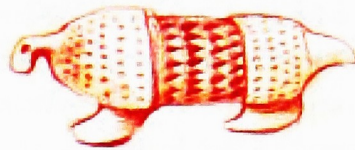
Another challenge was to make the story attractive by the use of elements to which audience could give the right interpretation. Knowing that every person has a different perception of the world, and also, knowing the amount of symbols and meanings that take place in the work, I had to struggle between the ideas of giving an explanation for every single detail or letting them participate on their own, so that the work is comprised of many little stories as part of the main idea.

It was very important to make from a written treatment of ideas and visualizations a comprehensive story that could be shown in a non-sequential order. Sometimes words do not express so easily what our ideas are. The written treatment of **Three Stories Toward Creation** was for some people a confusing mixture of symbols that moved through the screen of their minds without a specific message. The challenge was to communicate the meaning of those symbols in an artistic production, or at least make them a little understandable for those who do not know anything about the pre-Hispanic cultures in Latin America.

In deciding to create a visual style for the work I had to move away from my two previous films at RIT, which were 3D fictional fantasies, although expressing political commentary. This new film had to be more directly expressive of my graphic background. In the beginning it was challenging because I did not know if the film was going to succeed using a new approach.

Sound and music production is a difficult part to organize. Whether there is a composer or the sound is adapted from existing material it is always difficult to deal with it. This production could not be an exception. I did not find an American composer performer who produced music closely related to the theme of my work. I opted for getting some soundtracks and cultural patrimony records from Colombia plus some traditional instruments to reproduce some of the sounds and musical tunes based in the repetition of flutes and rattles. This approach made the music something that I felt was representative of the region.

VIII. Goals Achieved with the Work



I am convinced that **Three Stories Toward Creation** has achieved more goals than the project originally intended. First of all, it let me show what my artistic style is. This animated production has images that can be considered a continuation of my graphic work. It is graphic design in time and movement. I can say now that my graphic work is ART because I have joined my knowledge, my expression and my passion in one single work. I wish to continue producing these meaningful works to find new forms of moving graphic expression. I consider **Three Stories Toward Creation** itself an achievement. Not many Colombians have produced a piece like this. Maybe because the production possibilities in my country are not as great, or because not many people feel the need to make a work like this. But, **Three Stories Toward Creation** makes me feel proud of the work and the effort I put into it.

The creation of this animated short as a political statement to face social and cultural discrimination has achieved important goals. It shows to new and old generations the value and richness of Latin American culture, plus the importance of authenticity as a result of our history. It is a simple piece that says "This is

my race, this is my life”, showing how heritage plays an important role in our lives and why it is important to keep our traditions alive in order to maintain our identity.

In a personal interpretation of the work, I consider that it points to say that culture in any race, place or time, is the result of cyclic periods of *Thesis*, *Antithesis* and *Synthesis*, where the synthesis becomes the thesis of a new cycle. The story of Bachué is the native thesis of creation that found its antithesis in the new credo of Christianity. Then they together created a new expression in a mixture of ideas and traditions that is the synthesis of both. It can be considered that also the African race was that new antithesis of that thesis and as a result of that it shows today another synthesis.

The level of visual simplicity in this production is an achievement. Many scenes are simple compositions where basic shapes and color produce an important effect that contains a meaning in most of the cases. The solution of the constantly changing frame is something that was a good and appropriate decision, a concept related to the technique that became part of the message, and I am impressed by the impact it has on the audience.

It has also achieved good technical solutions. It was able to combine 2D and 3D animation with a well-balanced participation of each. When three-dimensional objects were mixed with two-dimensional elements the result produced a new way of representation that can be considered unique. The animated masks were produced from a new technique that had a positive participation in the creation of morphing figures. This led into a search of forms that were in some moments constrained by computer capabilities, but that at the end, produced new shapes that moved very nicely on the screen. Finally, the exploration of editing techniques, avoiding straight cuts and moving figures from one composition in to the next, gave an interesting result of visual effects and film composition in a nontraditional way of storytelling.

IX. Future Goals



The immediate goal for this production is to promote it in different venues of exhibition around the world. It will be sent to animation festivals in the United States, Europe and South America. It will be presented to the National Department of Culture in Colombia as a proposal for a series of short cultural clips to be broadcast nationally. It will be presented to the National Department of Education in Colombia with a proposal to produce more episodes to be distributed to public and private schools. The project will be complemented with other pre-Columbian, African and Hispanic myths and events of Colombian history.

X. Conclusion



Three Stories Toward Creation is a film that can be evaluated in three different ways.

From the academic point of view I can say that my main goal at the Rochester Institute of Technology has been achieved. This film shows that treatment, storyboard, sound, animation and editing teachings were fruitful. I look at my work and I see many good things, some others that could have been better. But mainly things that I like. It is a piece full of passion and expression that conveys what my experiences are and where my ideas are going. The idea in the work is the result of the effort that the School of Film and Animation makes to promote students to be more than little machines worried only about technique. Of course technique is important, but the idea is central. I am glad that my work shows how important the idea is. And I am also glad that I had the support from my committee in the development of my idea and the production of my piece.

The second way of seeing the work is on the visual and graphic level. Graphic design always looks for simplicity in image and richness in communication. And this piece is based on that con-

cept, but multiplied by time and movement, making the process of creation steeper and narrower. I think the work captures the simplicity in forms and characters as it communicates a message made of many icons and representations. But the most difficult part was to maintain those two rules in eight minutes of production, that is in constant movement. It is a good start for what can be called a “style of animation”.

The analysis from the political angle goes beyond what the images are. It is a production that presents with symbols and history the truth of Colombian society today. I consider that the three episodes represent a very strong argument in relationship with “who we are” and “who we want to be”. Our society has not changed in more than five centuries. The children of those few closely related to the XV century Spanish oligarchy are still the high dominant class today. The working “Criollo” class, the mixture between Conquistador and Indian, is still dreaming of the wealth and pure race that they never will be. And the very little Indian groups are forgotten in their misery, trying to keep their traditions alive in the last corners of the country. At the end, we are all the same race that shares the same culture without knowing how rich we are. **Three Stories Toward Creation** tries to be part of the awakening trend that has been growing slowly during the last decades, and I hope it reaches to those new generations in order to fulfill its purpose in a search for our true identity.

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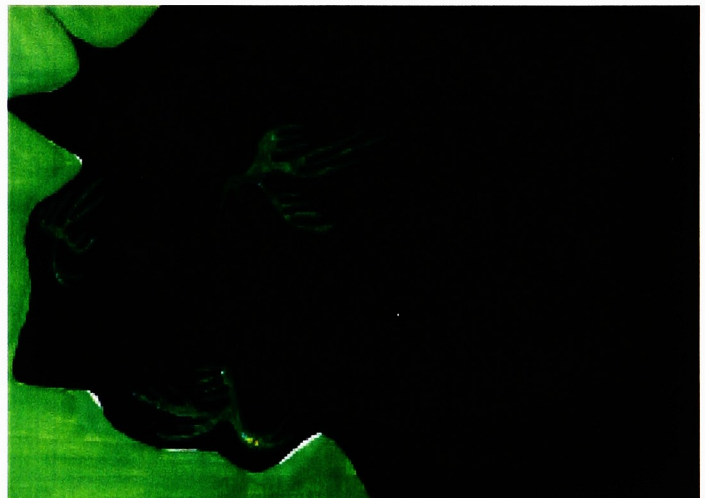
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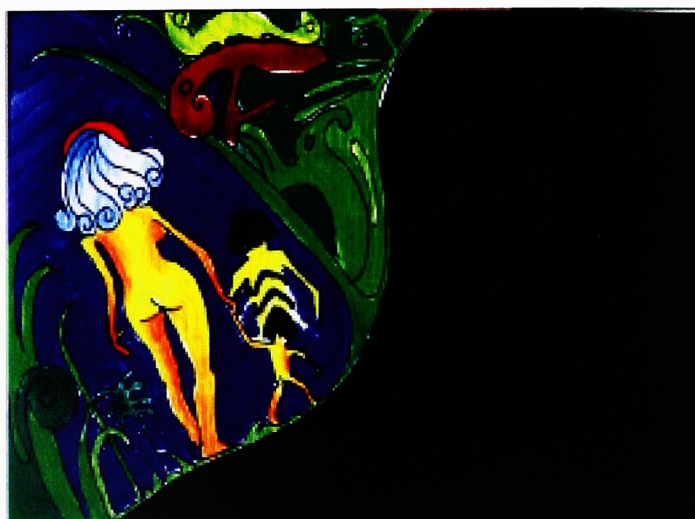
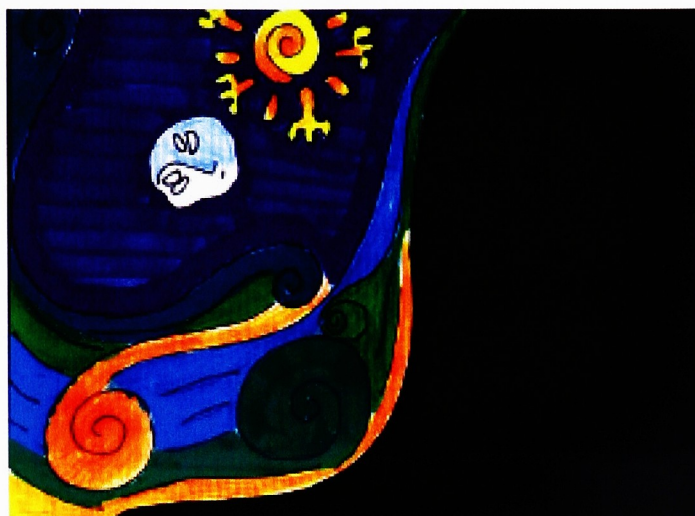
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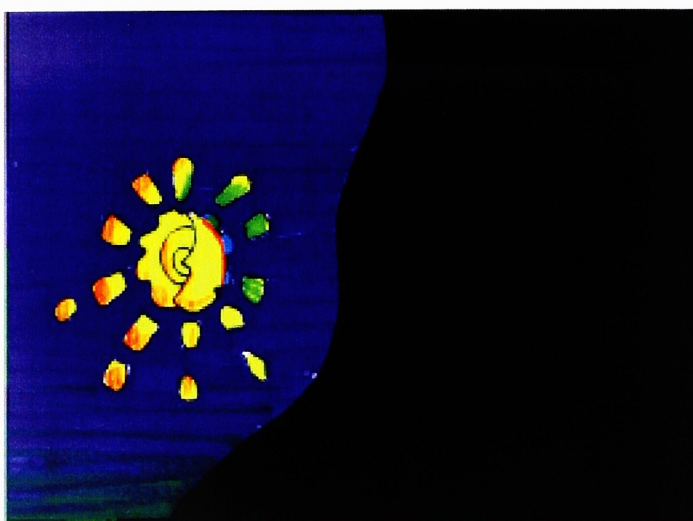
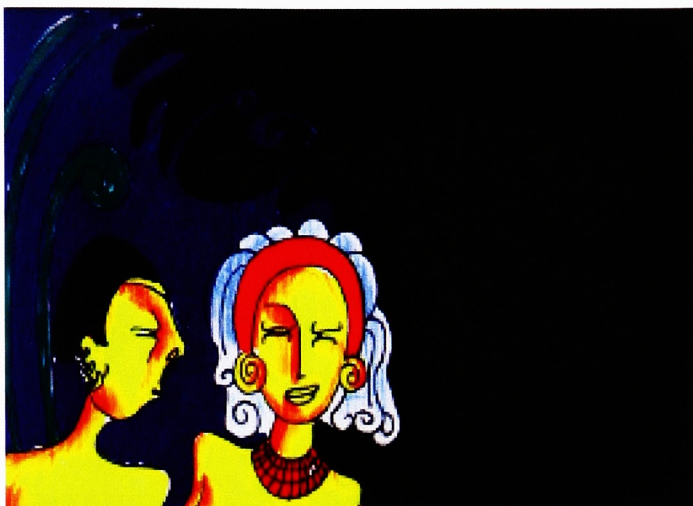
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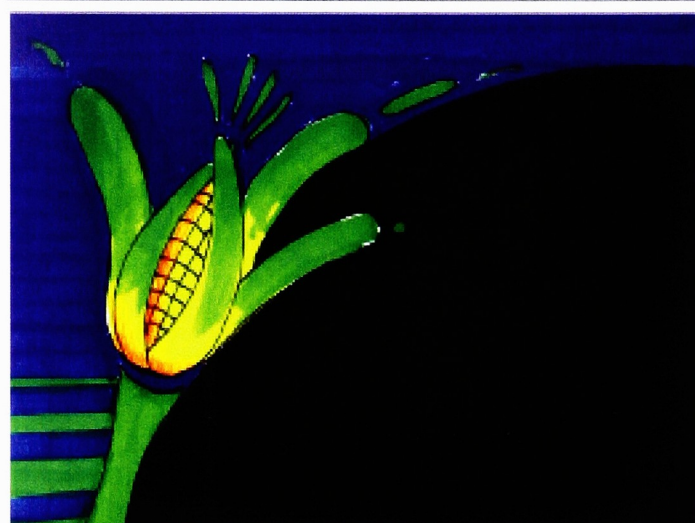
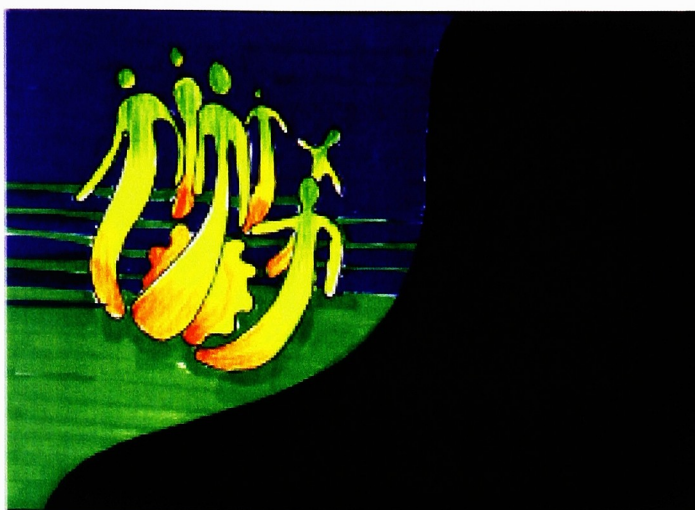
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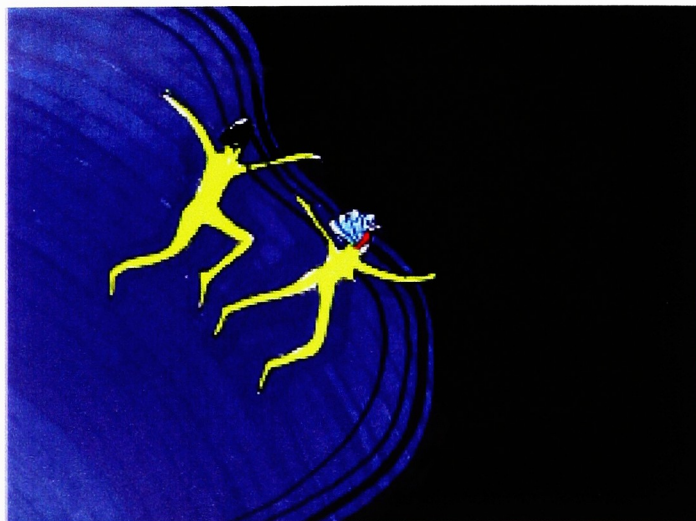
Story board
Bachué

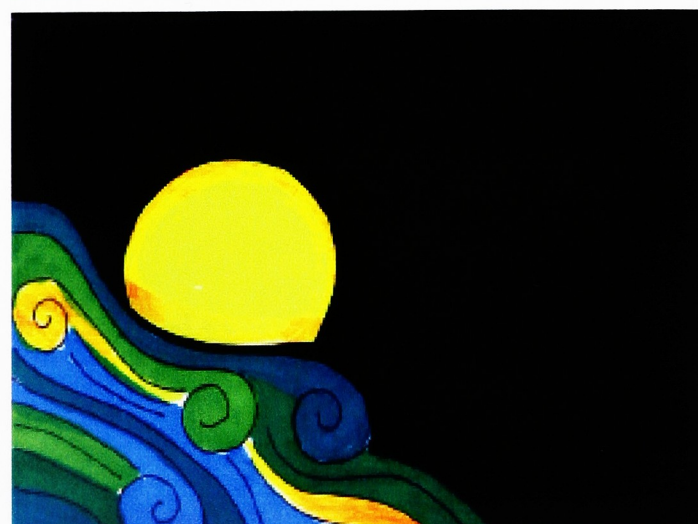
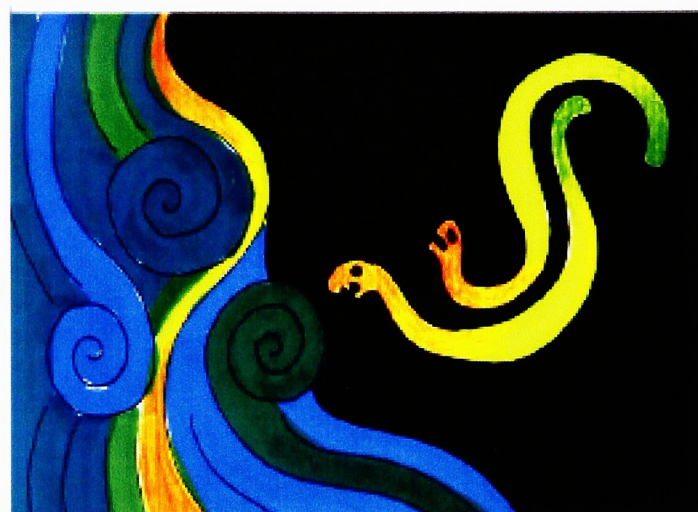




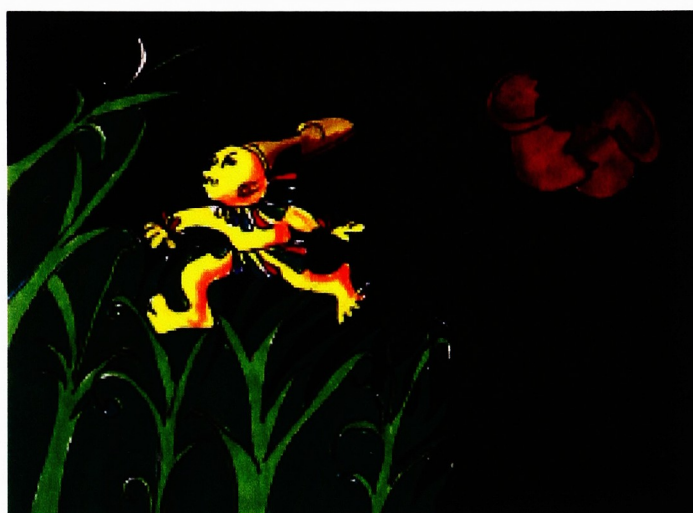




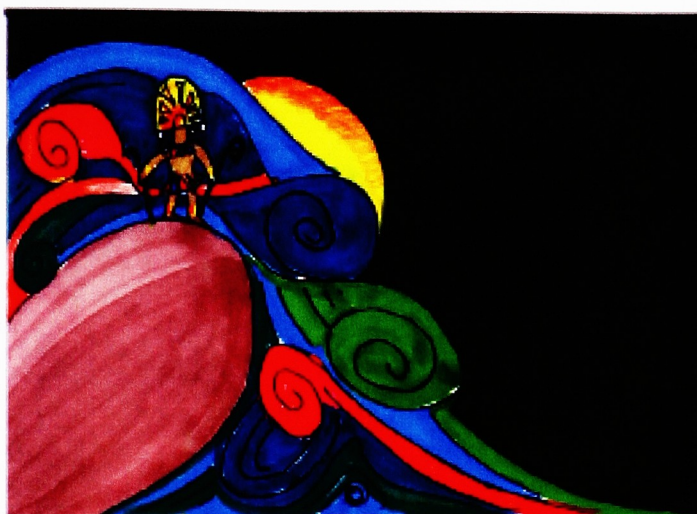


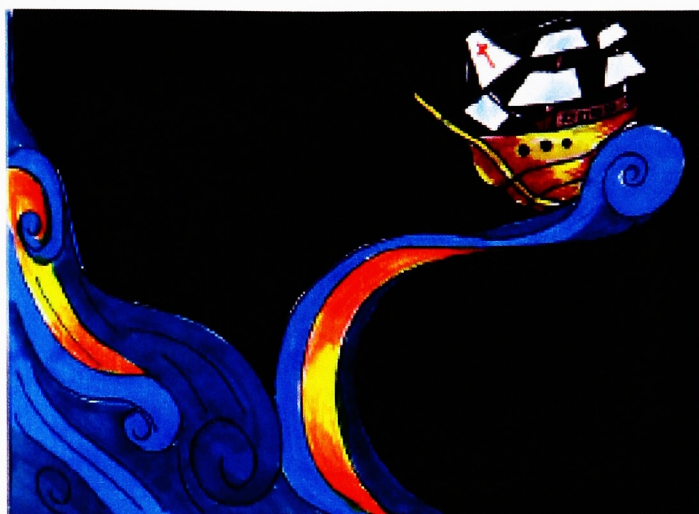


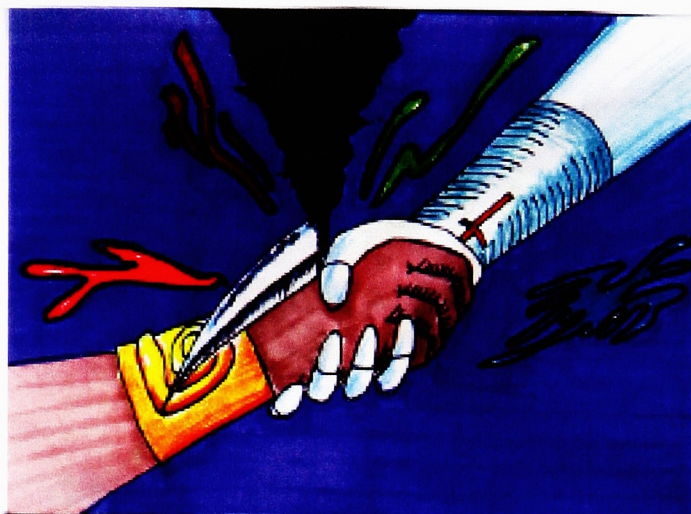
Story board
Broken Pot







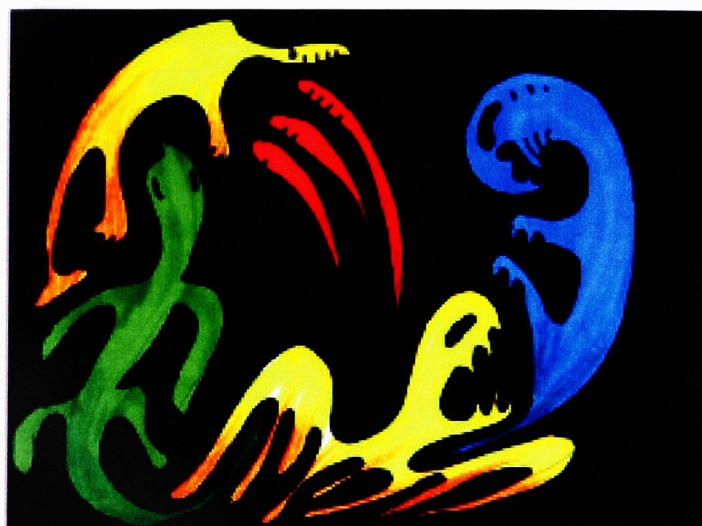
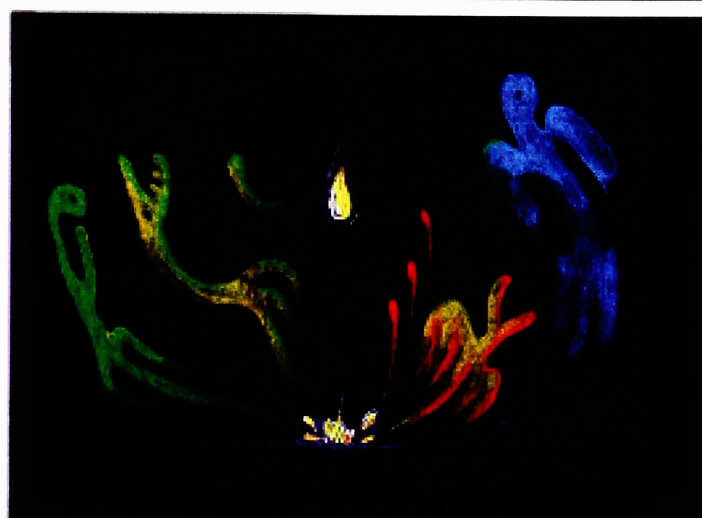


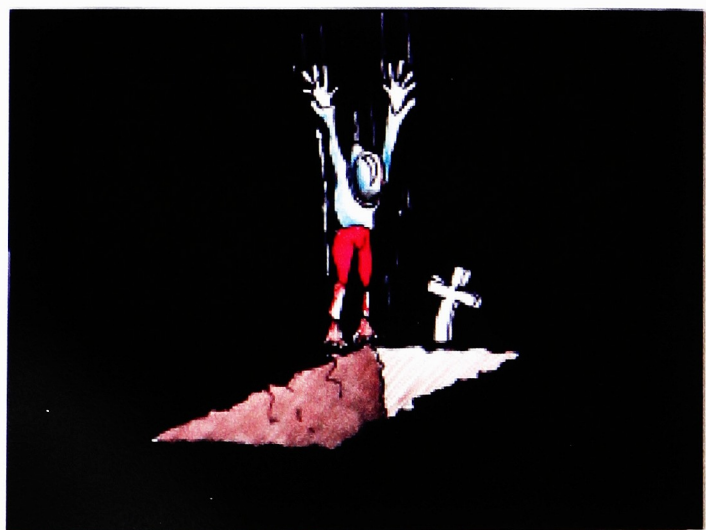




Story board
Cross of Gold

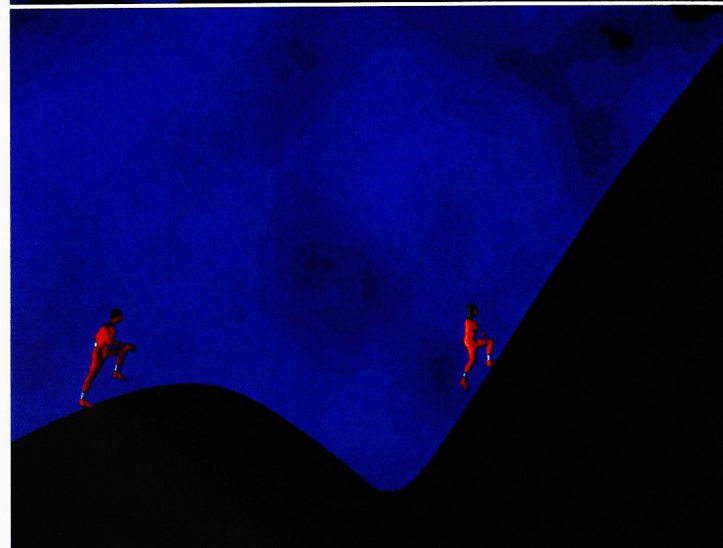
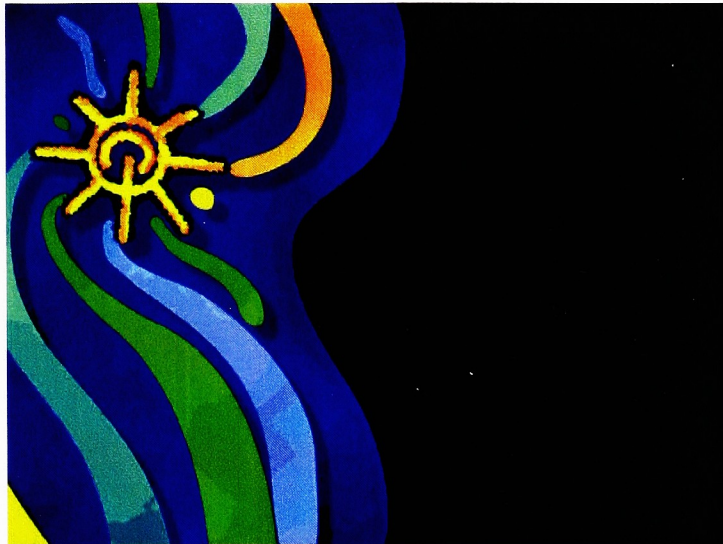


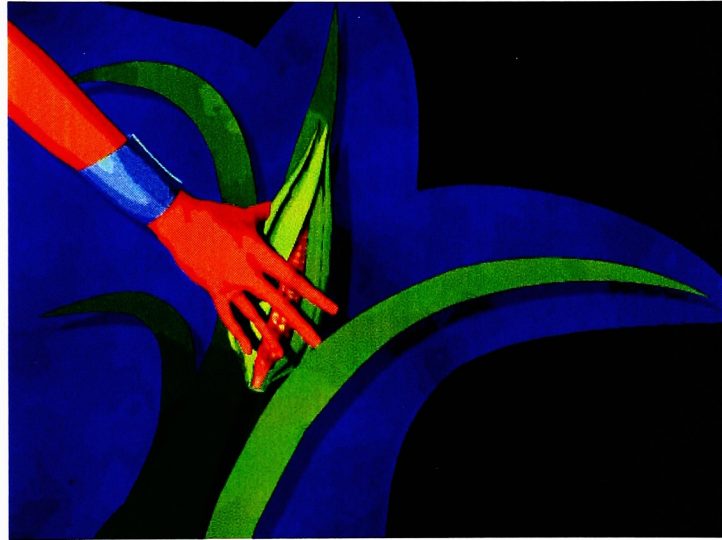
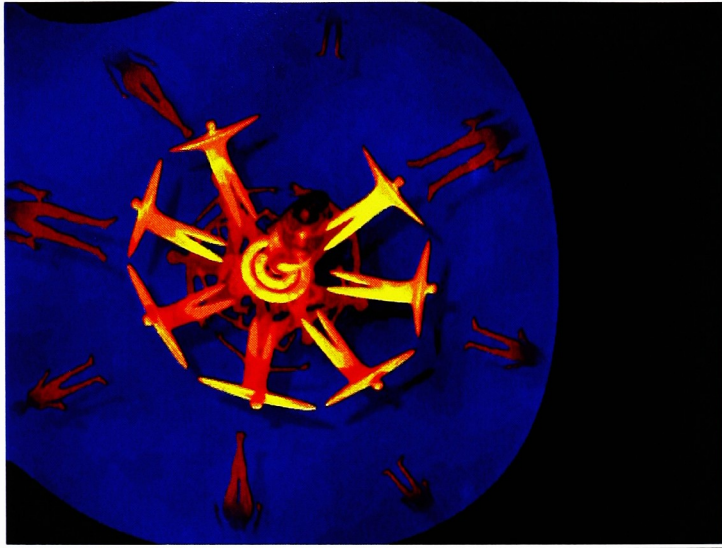


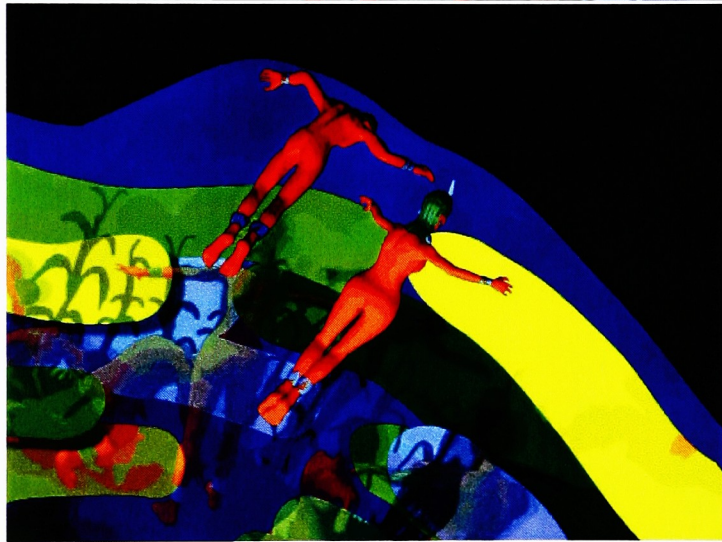




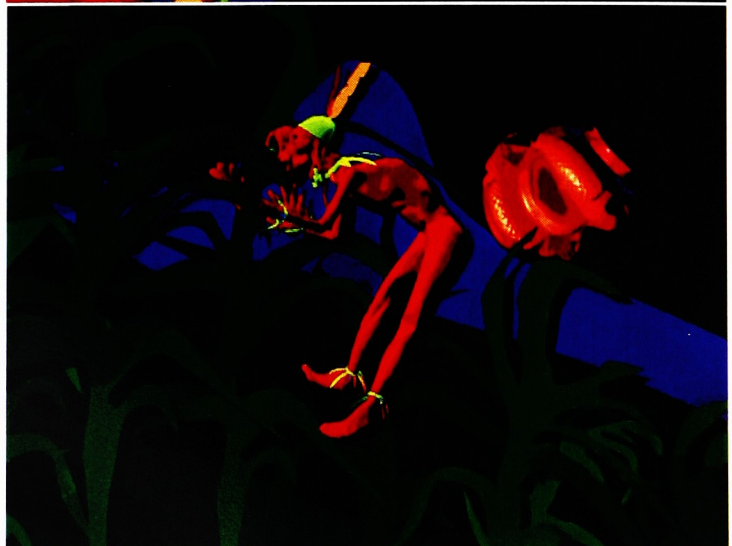
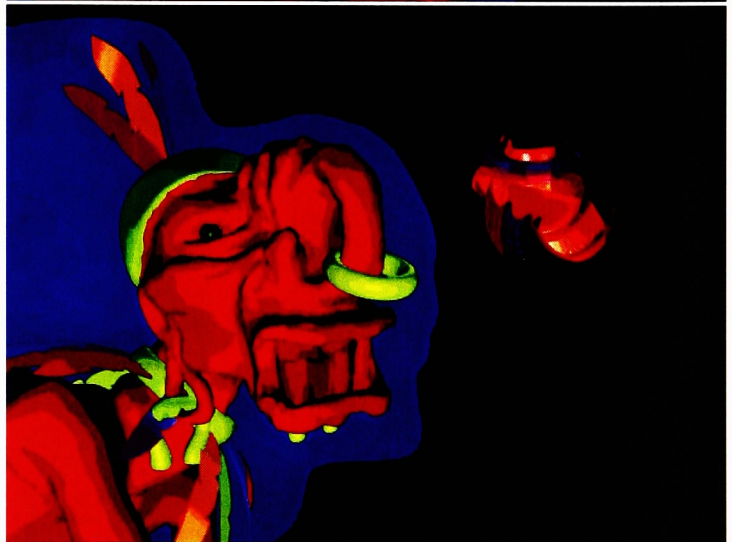
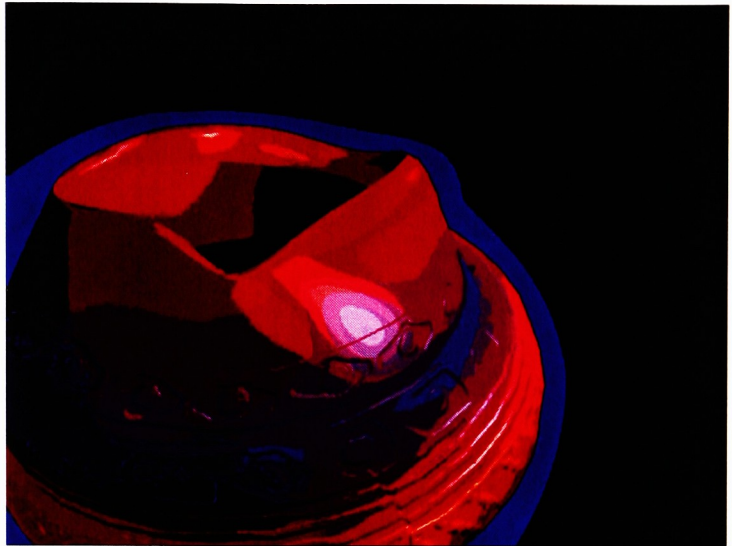
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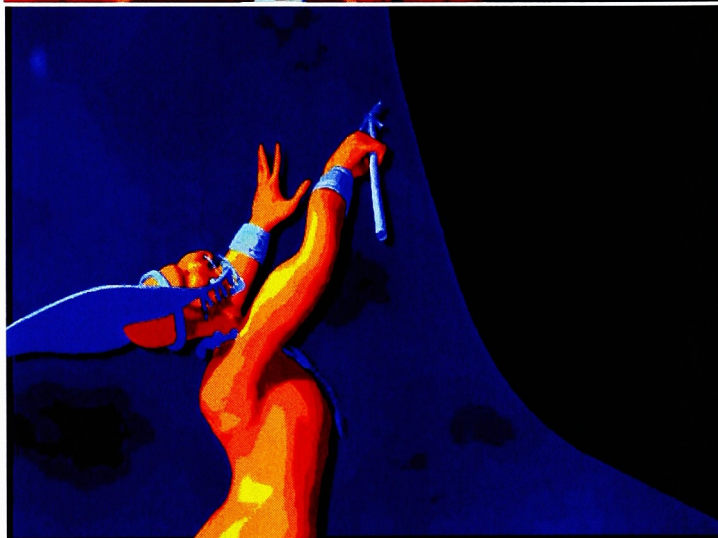


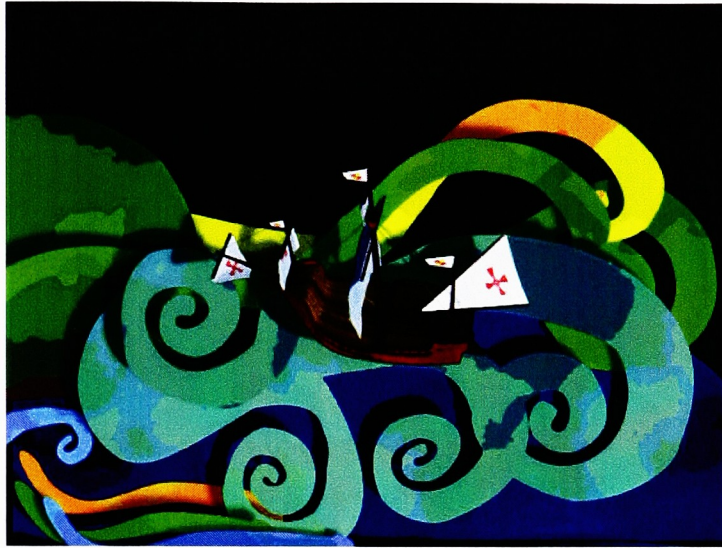




Broken Pot









Cross of Gold







Proposal for an MFA Thesis Project

Three Stories Toward Creation

by Rodrigo Gómez Claros

MFA Imaging Arts / Computer Animation
SCHOOL OF FILM AND ANIMATION
ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

Rochester, New York

April 2001

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Three Stories Toward Creation

Intent of Story

I intend to express in this piece three stages of native civilization in Latin America and how the fantasy and magic of Indian creation was destroyed by the invasion of the Spaniards which is an ever evolving fantasy that is being redeemed by history and is waiting for justice.

Technically I intend to establish the differences between cultures by the use of 2D and 3D characters and environments plus the division of the screen as two separate worlds that are united as one at the end of the work.

I am planning also to create two versions of the piece:

- The first version is going to be narrated to convey the historical and mythological aspects of Indian and Spanish relationships in Latin America from pre-Hispanic to modern times. The storyteller will also clarify some elements of the native symbolism that is used as part of the historical and educational message of the piece.
- The second version is going to be created as a stand-alone visual/aural work which will convey the story with out the need of the narrator.

The following Script/treatment is divided in three short stories with a total length of 4 minutes and 15 seconds.

Title: Bachue

Length: 90 seconds

Narrator: In the beginning the world was in darkness and God contained the light within himself and decided to bring it to the world.

It starts with the screen in black while an Indian flute plays. Then Indian representations of birds come in to fly around in the left side of the black screen. The right side of screen maintains in black but the line that divides the two halves keeps changing in shape all the time. The birds dance and fly over mountains and valleys that appear on the background still in darkness. They project light over the land from their eyes and beaks. From the bottom of the frame appears the sun and after him the moon. Sun and moon join in the sky then a 2D representation of water fills the left part of the screen.

Narrator: Then the waters were created and our mother Bachue and her three years old son came out from the big lake.

A stylized woman figure emerges from the water. She is naked and carries a child in her arms. The woman walks with her child through forest and animals of the 2D Indian world. The boy



grows up while walking next to the woman. When he is as tall as she is their faces join to become the sun and the moon.

Narrator: They married and decided populate the earth.

Snakes, frogs, and other aquatic silhouettes surround them while they are turning around in the left part of the screen. Human figures blossom from the center of this union in repeated groups of six. The emerging forms become corn that keeps turning around.

Narrator: They taught their children the arts of socialization and how to cultivate our own food.

A hand comes into frame to crop the corn. Two hands lift up the corn offering it to the Sun on the background. The right side of the screen maintains in black.

Narrator: When their mission was completed they went back into the sacred lake leaving with us all the aquatic animals as a sign of their fertility.

The camera zooms out to see the silhouette of the couple and the other figures against the sun. The couple jumps into the sky and fly over the right black side of screen to become human embryos and then snakes. Then they go back to dive into the water in the left side of the screen. We see the sun and water fade out to black.

Title: Broken Pot

Length: 90 seconds

Narrator: The great priest in his praise foresaw chaos and destruction.

From the left comes into screen the 2D profile of an Indian priest looking up to the darkness. Then the sun appears behind of him. The sun moves slowly from left to the right black side. Then it becomes an Indian pot that cracks in two pieces. The priest scared runs and flies through the fields of corn. He kneels in front of the king of the Indians to tell him what hi saw.

Narrator: Our King looked at those signals and told us to be ready because it was the time for Gods to come to earth.

The 2D king is seated on his throne. He looks up to the sun. In the sun a black spot becomes a Christian cross that turns around to become a sword. The Indian King seems confused. He looks up and then looking down to the camera yells something in his native language. The king



stands up on the top of a mountain dressed with beautiful colors, feathers and gold ornaments looking at the distant waters and the sun.

***Narrator:** They came in big sailing houses.*

From the dark side of screen comes into frame a 3D ship making the 2D waters wave over the right side to fill it up letting the ship sail on them. The ship gets closer to where the king is.

***Narrator:** And they had two heads and four legs.*

A stylized 3D figure of a man on his horse jumps from the ship to climb the mountain. The Indian opens his arms and bows. Then the 2D hand of the king joins to the 3D white hand of the other man. Indian silhouettes of snakes, jaguars, birds, frogs turn around them. When a sword tears the screen in two.

***Narrator:** But they were evil forces that wanted only one thing.*

From the Indian wrist a bracelet falls off and the white hand catches it. The bracelet shines becoming a 3D object. In the full screen the 3D man and his horse jump from mountain to mountain disappearing in the background followed by the shadows of the Indian silhouettes. The landscape becomes 3D and fade out to black.

Title: Cross of Gold

Length: 75 seconds

***Narrator:** The old man paid to his God what he did to us.*

The 3D old conquistador with his helmet on walks heavily on a white environment. While Indian representations of gods and spirits fly around him pushing and bothering him, he bears a golden cross on his back (as Jesus Christ). He grabs his sword to make the spirits go away but they are faster to avoid his strikes. They sit on his cross and laugh at him. The old man weeps and swears.

***Narrator:** Even though he was still fighting against us....*

His tears roll down as golden drops that crash against the ground then becoming Indian spirits raise and attack him again. They lift him up to let him fall inside of a tomb.

***Narrator:** His biggest confrontation was against himself because he had become part of our civilization and enemy of those whom he owed respect in the past.*



When he tries to get up he turns around letting us see the other side of his body that is a flat 2D representation of an Indian man. The camera zooms out and the cross that he was carrying becomes a pre-Columbian figure. In a close up of the 3D and the 2D face, the 3D face gets rotten and fades out to black. The 2D Indian profile smiles and fades to white.

Narrator: We are the result of those who destroyed and those who accepted that destruction willing to express how important is our past to be able to create our future.



Project Budget

	<i>ESTIMATE</i>	<i>IN KIND</i>	<i>ACTUAL</i>
<i>Research</i>	\$800	\$600	\$200
<i>Script</i>	\$1200	\$1200	\$0
<i>Storyboard</i>	\$1200	\$1100	\$100
<i>Animatic</i>	\$1200	\$1100	\$100
<i>2D Character Design</i>	\$2500	\$2400	\$100
<i>2D Character Animation</i>	\$2000	\$2000	\$0
<i>3D Character Animation</i>	\$3000	\$3000	\$0
<i>3D Modeling</i>	\$6000	\$6000	\$0
<i>Image Retouching</i>	\$9000	\$9000	\$0
<i>Image Compositing</i>	\$9000	\$9000	\$0
<i>Soundtrack Composition</i>	\$400	\$350	\$50
<i>Soundtrack Recording</i>	\$1000	\$900	\$100
<i>Musicians</i>	\$400	\$250	\$150
<i>Hardware</i>	\$9500	\$7100	\$2400
<i>Software</i>	\$3200	\$3200	\$0
<i>Orb Drive</i>	\$300	\$300	\$0
<i>Videotapes</i>	\$120	\$0	\$120
<i>CD-R</i>	\$50	\$0	\$50
<i>Orb Drive Disks</i>	\$90	\$0	\$90
<i>TOTAL</i>	\$50,960	\$47,500	\$3,460



Time-line

Week	Modeling	2D Animation	3D Animation	Render	Music &Sound	Compositing Editing
SUMMER 01	01					
	02					
	03					
	04					
	05					
	06					
	07					
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Marketing Plan

This film is being designed to recreate and refresh in people's mind the origins of our culture as a tool bringing wisdom and knowledge. The trilogy "Three stories toward Creation" can be considered as pilot for the cultural series "Mi Tierra y su Cultura" which will be promoted in TV stations and animation festivals in South, Central, North America.

TV Stations:

RCN Television - Colombia
Caracol Television - Colombia
Señal Colombia - Colombia
Televisa - México
Frecuencia Latina - Perú
Telemundo - USA
Univision - USA
VTV - Venezuela

Animation Festivals:

Brussels Animation and Cartoon Festival - Belgium
Holland Animation Film Festival - Netherlands
Ottawa International Animation Festival - Canada
Animamundi 2002 - Brazil
The Oslo International Film Festival - Norway
Telluride Film Festival - USA
Siggraph 2002 - USA
New York Animation Festival - USA